

Payphone Relay Service

FCC Consumer Facts

Background

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) requires Telecommunications Relay Service (TRS) providers to be able to handle all calls normally provided by common carriers, including “coin sent-paid” calls (calls made from a coin-operated public payphone). A plan is in place that can help you, and others, make a relay call from a pay telephone. The plan was developed by local and long distance telephone companies, TRS providers, independent payphone service providers, and organizations representing people who are deaf, hard of hearing, or speech disabled.

The Relay and Payphone Plan

This plan covers local and long distance calls. You may make local and long distance calls from any coin-operated public pay phone through TRS. The consumer is responsible for determining if a call is local or long distance. If a call is local, you do not need to use coins, a calling card, or a prepaid card. Just dial 7-1-1 on most payphones and give the local number you wish to call. Long distance calls may be made by charging the call to your calling card, including debit prepaid card, or by calling collect. Charges for calling cards may vary, so check with your provider about their rates. More information on prepaid phone cards is available on the FCC’s Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau (CGB) Web site at www.fcc.gov/cgb/consumerfacts/prepaidcards.html.

TRS and How It Works

Telecommunications Relay Service (TRS) permits persons with a hearing or speech disability to use the telephone system via a text telephone (TTY) or other device. This is accomplished through TRS centers that are equipped to handle relay calls, and whose communications assistants (CAs) relay conversations between persons using either text or voice telecommunications devices.

TRS makes calls easier for people who require special telecommunications equipment, like a TTY, and people who use standard voice telephones. This service is in operation 24 hours a day, seven days a week, at no extra cost to callers. Your local relay service can be accessed by dialing 7-1-1, a toll free 800 relay service number, or the TRS center’s seven digit number that can be found in the Customer Guide pages of your local telephone directory.

To access TRS, a TTY user dials the telephone number of the local TRS center. For the TTY user, this first step – the outbound call to the TRS center – is equivalent to receiving a “dial tone.” The caller then gives the number of the party he or she wants to call to the CA. The CA, in turn, places an outbound voice call to the called party. The CA serves as the “link” in the conversation, converting all TTY messages from the caller into voice messages, and all voice messages from the called party into typed messages for the TTY user. The process is performed in reverse when a voice telephone user initiates the call to a TTY user.

Getting a Telephone Calling Card or Prepaid Card

If you want information about obtaining a telephone calling card or prepaid card, call your TRS provider, the business office of your local telephone company, your long distance

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carrier, or, if available, a center for individuals with special needs. The TTY and voice numbers for these offices or services can be found in the Customer Guide pages of your local telephone directory. Prepaid cards are also available at convenience stores, gas stations, grocery stores, and other places. The FCC does not regulate prepaid cards and their rates, so check with the provider and shop around for the best prices.

Types of TRS

There are several types of TRS available:

- Text-to-Voice TRS – uses a CA who speaks what a TTY user types, and types what a voice telephone user replies.
- Voice Carry Over (VCO) – enables a person who is hard of hearing, but who wants to use his/her own voice, to speak directly to the receiving party and to receive responses in text form through the CA.
- Hearing Carry Over (HCO) – enables a person with a speech disability to type his part of the conversation on a TTY.
- Speech-to-Speech Relay – With this option, a person with a speech disability uses a CA specially trained in understanding a variety of speech disorders. The CA repeats what the caller says in a manner that makes the caller's words clear and understandable.
- Video Relay Services – enables individuals who use sign language to make relay calls through the use of video conferencing equipment to CAs who can interpret their calls. This type of relay service is not required by the FCC, but is offered on a voluntary basis by certain TRS programs.
- Spanish Relay Services – telephone companies must provide interstate (between states) relay services in Spanish. While Spanish language is not required for calls within (intrastate) states, many states with large Spanish-speaking populations already offer this service on a voluntary basis.

Need More Information?

For more information about TRS, visit the FCC's Web site at www.fcc.gov/cgb/dro/trs.html. If you have questions, need assistance on other disability issues, or if you would like to receive free information about disability issues on a regular basis via e-mail, contact the FCC's Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau at fccinfo@fcc.gov.

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